



CALIFORNIA HEALTHY PETS ACT 2007 (AB 1634)

Frequently Asked Questions

The California Healthy Pets Act mandates spaying and neutering for animals over four months of age. The law will save millions of taxpayer dollars, reduce the forced euthanasia of adoptable animals, help our pets stay healthy, and safeguard our communities. Exemptions are available for purebred animals, for old or sick animals, for service animals and for law enforcement animals.

Q. Why does the State of California think it's their business to tell me what to do with my animal?

A. The State of California spends almost three billion dollars every decade to house and euthanize (kill) excess animals. Almost ten million animals pass through our animal shelters each decade. These animals are generated by many factors, including pet owners who allow either accidental or intentional pregnancies. Most people who allow their pet to breed do not understand the enormous fiscal and emotional impact to California.

As a taxpayer, this fiscal burden sits directly on your shoulders. The California Healthy Pets Act is a simple, straightforward way to begin to reduce this enormous fiscal burden, and to reduce the number of animals entering into and being killed in our shelter system.

Q. I have a purebred dog or cat and I breed (or want to breed) the animal. Will this law stop me?

A. No. If your animal is registered with a recognized group, such as the AKC, you may obtain an intact permit. Any animal with an intact permit may breed.

Q. I have a dog or cat that is not any specific breed (a mutt). How will I be affected?

A. If your animal is spayed or neutered already, you are not affected.

Any dog or cat over four months of age without an intact permit should be spayed or neutered; either at a veterinarian's office or at one of the many free and low cost spay/neuter programs in California.

Q. Does keeping my pet intact really have an effect? I am not part of this problem and my pet does not breed.

A. An enormous number of animals are generated each year from accidental pregnancies, many from responsible pet owners who thought there was no chance that their animal would become pregnant or contribute to a pregnancy.

Q. Will this law keep track of how many litters my purebred animal has, and who I sell or give the animals too? Do I have to report when my purebred animal has a litter?

A. No. This law has no provisions for reporting or tracking litters. If your purebred animal has an intact permit, you may breed them.

Q. I cannot afford to spay or neuter my animal.

A. There are many free and low cost spay/neuter programs in California, and after this law takes effect we expect to see an increase in such programs.

Q. Does this law really have public safety benefits? That sounds hard to believe.

A. Unaltered dogs are three-times more likely to attack humans and other animals. California suffers the nation's highest occurrences of dog bites, animal attacks and attack-related fatalities in the nation and children are the most common victims. We can reasonably expect to see this number reduced as the number of roaming, unaltered dogs is reduced.



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Q. Don't we only kill old and sick animals in our shelters?

A. The sheer number of unwanted animals requires that we kill healthy animals of all ages in our shelters. In some shelters neonate kittens (bottled fed) have among the highest euthanasia rates, since there are not enough workers to take care of their special needs.

Q. Why is a state law needed? Can't the individual cities and counties come up with their own rules?

A. Most of our overburdened city and county animal services do not have the time or resources to develop appropriate local ordinances. Also, a uniform state law stops the undesirable "patchwork" effect of local laws.

Q. Won't this be the end of mutts?

A. The enormous amount of excess animals in our state ensures that there will always be a large supply of mutts, regardless of the success of this law. The goal is to reduce the number of animals entering and euthanized in our shelters, not to eliminate mutts or any specific breed.

Q. Aren't veterinarians supporting this just because they will make money from it?

A. An animal that is spayed or neutered has fewer health problems and therefore may require less veterinarian visits during their life. The total effect on the workload of veterinarians in the state is unknown, but may be negligible.

Many veterinarians support this bill because they understand the health and safety benefits, and because they see the continued killing of so many healthy animals in our society as a moral crisis.

Q. It seems like there is no way to enforce this law.

A. Several communities in California already have successful spay and neuter ordinances. The main enforcement mechanism is voluntary compliance, as the majority of citizens prefer to be in compliance with our laws.

The actual citation will be like a "fix-it" ticket for an animal. If cited, animal owners will have an opportunity to get their animal altered and avoid a fine. The law provides for discretion and flexibility of permits and fees at each of the local counties.

Q. Will California be the first state to enact such a law?

A. No, at least one other state (Rhode Island) has a statewide mandatory spay/neuter law.

Q. Will the law have an immediate effect on the number of animals passing through our shelters?

A. We expect a 2 to 3 year lag before we see significant reductions and up to 10 years before the fuller effect of the law is seen.

Q. The law says that an animal should be spayed/neutered at 4 months, isn't that too early?

A. An animal may be safely altered at almost any age, and animals can start reproducing as early as 6 months of age.¹

If you feel that your animal is too young for spaying/neutering, the law provides for a delay, if approved in writing by a veterinarian.

Q. My animal is too old, or too sick to be altered.

A. The law provides an exemption for old or sick animals, if approved in writing by a veterinarian.



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Q. Getting pregnant improves the behavior of female dogs and cats, and so I want my animal to have at least one litter.

A. This is a myth. Contrary to what some people believe, getting pregnant - even once - does not improve the behavior of female dogs and cats. In fact, the mating instinct may lead to undesirable behaviors and result in undue stress on both the owner and the animal.¹

Q. Spaying or neutering is going to change my pet's personality, or make them fat, and I don't want that.

A. The procedure has no effect on a pet's intelligence or ability to learn, play, work or hunt. Most pets tend to be better behaved following the operation, making them more desirable companions.¹

Contrary to popular belief, the surgery will not make your pet fat.¹

Q. Are there any other California laws covering this issue?

A. Yes, according to the CALIFORNIA CIVIL CODE and the CALIFORNIA FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL CODE, "It is the policy of the state that no adoptable animal should be euthanized if it can be adopted into a suitable home."

California shelters have been forced to disobey these laws due to the overwhelming numbers of unwanted animals. The California Healthy Pets Act will provide a reduction in the number of animals and thus allow our state to move towards compliance with these existing rules.

Q. Why are you trying to take away my pit bull?

A. This law does not mention any specific breeds and does not stop anyone from breeding their animal, provided that the animal is registered with a recognized organization outlined in the bill and has an intact permit.

If a city or county has a stricter law or one that is breed specific it will supersede this law.

Q. I can see that there is an enormous problem in our state with unwanted animals, but this law goes too far into areas of personal freedom.

A. California has a history of enacting laws that reach into areas that some people consider personal freedom, when our fiscal health is grossly impacted or when public health and safety issues are at stake.

Our mandatory helmet law for motorcycle riders (California Vehicle Code, Division 12, Chapter 5, Article 7, Section 27803) is an example of such a law. That law intrudes into areas that some people consider personal choice, but the millions of dollars and thousands of lives that have been saved are widely seen as a public benefit that outweighs an individual's right to ride without a helmet.

References:

1 - AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association), "What you should know about spaying and neutering", July 2005